

IN SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 2, 1837.

Read, and ordered to be printed.

Mr. KNIGHT made the following

REPORT :

*The Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, to whom was referred the resolution of the Senate instructing them to inquire into the cause of the destruction by fire of the building in which was the General Post Office, the City Post Office, and the Patent Office, report:*

That the committee commenced the inquiry by addressing letters to the Postmaster General, the City Postmaster, and the Superintendent of the Patent Office, from each of whom answers were received, and are hereunto annexed. We further proceeded by examining several persons who were first at the place of conflagration, but had not progressed far before it was ascertained we were following in the track of the committee of the House of Representatives, and that all the persons we had examined, or were about to examine, had already been examined, and their depositions taken by the committee of the House. And believing that no information would be elicited which would not come to the knowledge of Congress through that committee, we therefore concluded it would not shed any light on the subject by proceeding further with the examination of those persons. But to suspend the investigation and wait the development of some new fact or discovery of some other person possessing some knowledge or information of the matter referred to the committee, would better accomplish the object required by the resolution. But no such development or discovery having come to the knowledge of the committee, we therefore submit the statements of the Postmaster General, the City Postmaster, the Superintendent of the Patent Office, and, also, of the honorable Mr. Ruggles, of the Senate, James Summers, Samuel Crown, Henry Bishop, sen., and Cornelius Cox, as containing all the information obtained by the committee concerning the object of the inquiry aforesaid; all of which are appended to and make a part of this report.

The committee cannot forbear remarking that the practice of placing ashes in and near the wood, coal, and other combustibles appertinent to the public offices, cannot be too strongly reprehended, and in their opinion such practice should be discontinued and abolished.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, *January 3, 1837.*

Sir: In compliance with the request contained in your letter of the 20th ultimo, I proceed to give you all the information in my possession in relation to the late destruction of the Post Office building by fire.

My residence is on the east side of Seventh street, nearly opposite the end of the Post Office building lately occupied by the Patent Office and City Post Office, and but a few rods distant. I left the Department soon after dark on the evening of the 14th ultimo, and retired early to bed, being quite indisposed. Between the hours of 3 and 4 o'clock on the morning of the 15th, the cry of fire was heard. Still being very unwell, I requested one of my family to look out and inform me where the fire was, and learnt that no appearance of fire was visible either from the east or west windows of my dwelling. The cry of fire was repeated at intervals, and in a few minutes Mr. Laurenson, a clerk in the Auditor's office, rapped at my door, and stated that the Post Office was on fire. I instantly left my bed, and, looking out at a front window, saw no signs of fire on any part of the building, the east end being in full view. I dressed, and, on going out, observed smoke issuing from the eastern door. Passing round to the front, I observed smoke issuing also from the cracks in the windows of the principal room of the City Post Office, and perceived a light over the front door, evidently produced by the flame within. Not observing a single person, and having no means to extinguish a fire so much advanced in the combustible matter with which the City Post Office was filled, I thought it my duty to proceed to save the books of the General Post Office. I entered the passage at the west end of the building, and saw a light over the door which separated the City Post Office from the passage of the Post Office Department, through the cracks of which the smoke was forcing its way. I found Mr. Reynolds, a watchman, in the passage, and Mr. Baldwin, a clerk in the contract office, already in his room, preparing to remove his books. A few other persons soon joined us, and we proceeded to remove the books in every room on the lower floor, after which an accession of force proceeded to secure the files of papers and the furniture. While engaged in removing the books I twice observed persons attempting to open the door which led from the passage into the City Post Office, whom I requested to desist, lest the smoke, if not the flame, should rush in upon us, and prevent our saving the books and papers. On their expressing a belief that the fire could be extinguished, I told them to go to the front or end door of the City Post Office, whence the fire was much more accessible. Some of them stated that those doors were fast, and inquired whether they should break them open. I answered in the affirmative, and they left the Department, as I understood, for the purpose of breaking open the doors, and making an attempt to extinguish the fire. At that moment no light appeared over the door, the fire being obscured and partially smothered, it is presumed, by a dense smoke.

Having seen all the books sent out of the first story, I went up into the second. In the big room (so called) I observed Mr. Suter, the principal pay clerk, busily employed, with several others, in carrying out the books of the Auditor's office. I passed through that room to the rooms of the appointment office, which adjoined the Patent Office, on the second story, and, as I believed, saw all the books of that office sent out.

In the passage I observed Mr. Ellsworth, the Commissioner of Patents, attempting to force open a closed window or door leading from the second floor of the General Post Office into the passage of the Patent Office. Apprehending that the smoke, if not the fire, would render it impossible to enter the passage of the Patent Office, and that the only effect of opening that avenue would be to cut short our exertions to save the contents of the General Post Office, I so intimated to Mr. Ellsworth. Instantly reflecting, however, that he must feel it his duty to use all possible means to save the books of his own office, I turned from him to renew my exertions. There were scuttles through the floor at the end of the passages in the General Post Office next to the Patent Office and the City Post Office, through which the smoke was rapidly ascending from the door of the City Post Office, and I expected every instant to see it followed by flames. If Mr. Ellsworth had effected an entrance there, it would have been at the imminent hazard of his life, as his retreat was liable every moment to be cut off. I met with him again in the building, when he told me he could not even find a ladder by which he might enter the windows of the second story and save his books.

On turning from Mr. Ellsworth the first time, I met Mr. Eliot, the chief examiner, who told me the doors in the third story were locked, and inquired whether he should break them. I answered in the affirmative, and followed him back through the big room and up into the third story, where I saw him and another gentleman forcing the doors of the rooms.

Having observed, from the illumination of the street in front, that the flames had burst out, it now occurred to me that my family might not be safe, as the wind might drive the flames in the direction of my dwelling-house, which, though covered with slate, was connected with a porch, and was near other buildings not so secured. I found the street in front of the General Post Office abandoned, and the heat so intense that I could scarcely pass on the opposite side. The flames were pouring in torrents out of the windows of the City Post Office and of the Patent Office, and were just bursting through the roof above. There was a gentle wind from a southwesterly direction, which drove the smoke and burning cinders immediately over my dwelling-house and those in the vicinity. The flaming cinders had already alighted in several places on the shingle roofs of the opposite houses, and I gave up for lost the entire blocks on both sides of Seventh street in the rear of the Post Office. I sent my wife and children to a place of safety, gave instructions to the servants, and leaving the house in charge of a few kind friends who volunteered to guard it, went out through a shower of fire, and returned by F street to the General Post Office. I again ascended to the third story, apprehending that there were books and papers in that quarter not yet removed, but found the passage entirely abandoned, and so full of dense smoke, that it could scarcely be entered without suffocation. Here ended my own efforts to rescue anything from the building. The flames were then making fearful progress in the lower passage, and had spread through most of the roof.

Passing around to give such directions as seemed to be required in relation to the guarding and preservation of the books, papers, and furniture which appeared in various directions upon the side pavements and streets, I returned to my dwelling, which I found free from danger, the

wind having veered to the south, so that the cinders were falling upon the open lot and upon the back parts of the houses and on the out-houses upon the west side of Seventh street, which were well protected by the vigilance of their owners and occupants, aided by a few of the citizens.

Early in the morning I caused all the books and papers which were lying in piles or scattered about the streets, to be conveyed to my house and deposited in the parlors. The furniture I directed to be collected in an open lot, and a guard set over it, which was done.

Of the cause of the fire, or the particular spot where it originated, I know nothing. I observed neither fire nor smoke about the basement of the City Post Office; but, having first discovered it above, it was natural that I should not look for it below. From the statements of the watchman who was on duty in the General Post Office, of the clerks of the City Post Office, and of other persons who made their observations ten or fifteen minutes before I did, my conviction is, that it originated in the basement, directly under the principal room of the City Post Office, and when I first came out, had burnt through the floor. No fires were kept in the basement of the City Post Office, and although it is ascertained that ashes were sometimes deposited there in a box on the cellar floor, no circumstance has come to my knowledge making it probable that the fire originated from them. Nor do I know any circumstance tending to show that it was the work of an incendiary, other than the fact that those rooms containing fuel were accessible from the street, and the absence of any other known cause.

One of the watchmen of the General Post Office, then on duty in the lower passage, reports to me that he was first alarmed by the smell of smoke, as if from smothered fire, and after examining sundry rooms in the General Post Office, discovered that the smoke came up through the cracks of a trap-door in the passage, close to the door of the City Post Office. Attempting to descend into the basement of the General Post Office, his candle was extinguished by a current of air mingled with smoke, when he gave the alarm by thumping at the door of the City Post Office, and crying fire in the streets.

If there be any other point on which information is desired by your committee, I shall be happy to give it as far as it is in my power.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

AMOS KENDALL.

Hon. JOHN M. ROBINSON,

*Chairman Com. P. O. and P. R., Senate.*

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CITY POST OFFICE,  
*Washington, D. C., December 21, 1836.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter advising me that the committee of the Senate charged with an inquiry into the causes of the late conflagration of the Post Office building, would be gratified to receive from me any information on the subject which might tend to promote the investigation as directed by the Senate.

Of my own personal observation I know but little. I left the office between 7 and 8 o'clock the evening before, enjoining upon the clerks,



as was my habit ever since I have been charged with the office, to be careful with the lights and fires. On the first alarm in the morning I repaired to the office; perceived a dense smoke issuing from the eastern part of the building, but saw no light or fire. My first effort was to collect the clerks, with the view of entering the office to save the letters, &c. One of them (Mr. Kennedy) at length appeared, and admonished me not to make the attempt, assuring me that it would prove fatal. I persisted notwithstanding, but was restrained by him and others, all of whom represented it as impracticable, and that repeated attempts had been made in vain, when there was less danger. This brief statement comprises all the information on the subject, not derived from others, that I possess.

As to what I have heard in relation to it, I presume the committee would prefer to learn it from the sources from which I derived it. I would therefore respectfully refer them to B. L. Bogan, Christopher Lansdale, Cornelius Cox, Samuel Crown, and James Summers; the first two of whom left the office at half past 2 o'clock in the morning of the fire, leaving the other three in charge of the office; to James A. Kennedy, a clerk in my office, John F. Callan, M. Callan, John Suter, Jacob Gideon, jun., George S. Gideon, Samuel P. Walker, Dr. Alexander Davis, John C. Rives, Robert S. Patterson, James Laurensen, Thomas Donoho, and Lambert Tree, all of whom, living near, were early at the fire.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,  
W. JONES, *Postmaster.*

Hon. JOHN M. ROBINSON, *Chairman, &c.*

PATENT OFFICE, *December 21, 1836.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 20th instant, and in obedience to the instruction of the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, beg leave respectfully to state, that the section of the Post Office building assigned to the Patent Office, and under my official charge, comprised the second and third stories of the eastern part of said building, immediately over the City Post Office.

I reached the Patent Office at a very early period of the recent conflagration, (about 4 o'clock, A. M.,) and made every personal effort to enter the office, but in vain. The same causes which prevented those who slept directly under it, in the City Post Office, rendered it impossible for me to enter, or to save any portion of public property under my charge.

I beg leave respectfully to suggest to the honorable committee, the names of honorable Mr. Ruggles of the Senate, Dr. T. P. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Steiger, and Henry Bishop, as persons who, either living directly opposite the Post Office building, or very early present at the conflagration, may perhaps be able to communicate some useful information to the honorable committee in regard to it.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

HENRY L. ELLSWORTH.

Hon. JOHN M. ROBINSON,

*Chairman Com. P. O. and P. R. of the Senate.*

*Testimony of Mr. Ellsworth.*

I was awoke by Mr. Steiger a few minutes before 4 o'clock, on 15th December, and arrived at the fire a few minutes after four. My first examination was to ascertain the place of the fire, with the hope of extinguishing it. The City Post Office was in flames, visible through the window, and no one could enter it.

I went around the whole building, and looked into the cellars as far as I could, but no fire was seen in any of them. I made an effort to reach the Patent Office by the usual door on the east side, but the smoke prevented me. I then made an effort to get into the Patent Office through the third story, as there was a window connecting the General Post Office and the Patent Office, through which window wood was passed into the Patent Office. Previous to my attempting to get into the Patent Office this way, one of the clerks had broken through an inner door of the City Post Office, and the smoke ascended so fast that I could not succeed in my object, although Mr. Steiger, Mr. Bishop, and myself, took up the carpet in Mr. Johnson's room to lay over the aperture through which the smoke ascended.

I abandoned any further effort to save the Patent Office papers from the inside of the building, and next tried to get a ladder to enter the window on the north side of the building, but no ladder could be obtained.

I ought to remark that, while examining as to the place of the fire, I met Mr. Kyle, superintendent of the building, and asked him if he knew where the fire was. He said he had been into the cellar, and passed along the passage until he came under the City Post Office, and that he saw fire dropping down from the floor above on to the ground, and that there was nothing on the ground to burn—the fire came from above—he passed the cellar in which the Patent Office wood is kept, but did not say he saw any fire there.

After I had been at the fire, as nearly as I can recollect, about fifteen or twenty minutes, I saw Doctor Jones (of the City Post Office) earnestly calling for his clerks. He inquired of me if my messenger was there—he wanted to ask him where and when he put ashes in the cellar. I called Mr. Bishop, who was near by. He then told Doctor Jones, in my presence, that he had just been *into the cellar* in which the Patent Office kept their wood and ashes, and that there was no fire in the cellar; and further said, that if either Doctor Jones or myself would go into the cellar, he would go in with us, and we could satisfy ourselves. We were then all standing very near the cellar windows opening into the room where the Patent Office wood and ashes were kept. Not the least ray of light was discoverable in the cellar at that time. If not improper, I will add that, from my knowledge of the building, it seems *utterly impossible* that, if the building was safe at 3 o'clock, when the mail was delivered, the City Post Office could not be in such general conflagration at half past 3, by the ignition of ashes in the cellar. The honorable Mr. Ruggles was among the first at the fire, and opened the door leading into the City Post Office, and can describe the situation of the fire.

HENRY L. ELLSWORTH.

SENATE CHAMBER, *January 22, 1837.*

SIR: In compliance with your request to furnish you with a statement of what knowledge I have respecting the conflagration of the Post Office and Patent Office building on the 15th of December, I enclose a copy of my testimony as taken down by the committee of the House in their investigation of the same subject, furnished to me by the clerk of that committee. It saves me the trouble of writing it out again.

In addition to that I will state two or three circumstances which have fallen under my observation. A few years since I was in the clerk's office in Lincoln county, Maine, where all the records of deeds and probate and court records for the county were kept. It was in the spring, and a man was removing a stove which had, during the winter, been standing in the middle of the room. It stood about 10 or 12 inches from the floor, with about two inches of sand under it, retained within cleats to protect the floor from the heat of the stove. On the sand being removed I observed the floor to have been burned and charred in two places directly under the stove, each place as large as my two hands. I broke up and removed the charred board easily with my finger. The under floor board was but a little discolored, not charred. The floor had been ignited and gone out of itself, not finding in its progress any current of air to feed or blow it into a flame.

Another case in my neighborhood was where a cook-stove stood about a foot from the plastered ceiling. The lathes took fire on the other side of the plastering, and the house came near burning down. It is not probable that the ceiling was at any time made so warm by the stove that one could not bear his hand upon it. Another similar instance occurred in the same place in a jeweller's shop, the stove standing 8 or 10 inches from the ceiling. Within a few rods of these a fire broke out on Sunday afternoon in a store in which there had been no fire for 24 hours. It proved to have taken in the beam on which the chamber fire-place rested. The hearth on the beam was composed of three thicknesses of brick. I have been informed of two other like instances in the vicinity where I live. In each of these cases the heat of the fire was wholly insufficient to produce immediate combustion. It was only by the long and uniform communication of it to the combustible material, through the medium of a slow conductor, excluding the external air, that ignition took place. Under such circumstances caloric acts slowly and *chemically* upon the fibre of the wood, producing a *latent* ignition, which gradually proceeds until the supply of caloric ceases, when its progress is stopped; or until it meets with a gentle current of air coming in through some crevice, which feeds and fans it into a flame. There is a certain combination of circumstances which will always produce this effect. The principal circumstances are those I have mentioned—a uniform supply of caloric passing through a slowly and steadily conducting medium in contact with the wood, excluding the external air, and continued for a considerable length of time.

The stove in the City Post Office, I understand, stood upon a pavement of brick of a single thickness, resting on the floor, perhaps filled in between with mortar or sand. Were or were not the circumstances here combined precisely those which are shown to be sufficient to produce

latent ignition? A crevice in the floor would supply the other circumstance necessary to produce open combustion. Had there been nothing on the floor there would have been much less danger; indeed none, except from coals falling on the floor. Sheet-iron or other metallic plate is a much safer material on which to place a stove, than brick, mortar, or sand.

I am, most respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN RUGGLES.

Hon. JOHN M. ROBINSON,

*Chairman Com. of the Senate on Post Office, &c.*

In corroboration of the opinion of Mr. Ruggles, he requests the following statement in regard to the recent fire in the Bank of England, may be hereto annexed.

*Protection of the Bank of England against fire.*

The recent fire in the printing department within the Bank of England, and the vast importance of there being a full assurance of safety for the enormous amount of securities and moneys deposited in this national establishment, may render the following account of the means of protection against any accident from fire, which the bank possesses within itself, interesting to the public generally.

In the first place the entire building is erected in a manner cautiously designed to prevent the spread of fire. In every department are strong rooms for the nightly lodging of books, moneys, and securities, and closets within these rooms, which, together with the rooms themselves, are deemed to be perfectly fire-proof. There is a nightly guard of 32 soldiers sent from the Tower, who have each his assigned post within the building. There are, besides, a number of the porters, of the principal clerks, and of other officers of the establishment, constantly resident within the walls of the building. A nightly watch of the confidential officers of the bank, who take turns in rotation, is rigidly required. A general survey of every department and office of the building is made by those gentlemen, who are on duty thrice in the course of every night, namely, at ten o'clock, at midnight, and at four o'clock in the morning. Occasional surveys of the more important apartments are made in the intervals between these stated times, of more or less extent, according to circumstances, and the degree of vigilance of the gentlemen whose turn it is to keep watch. It was to this wise precaution that the timely discovery of the recent fire is attributed.

There are seven very excellent fire-engines kept within the bank, which are monthly inspected by the maker, and there is in every department a good supply of fire-buckets. In each of the yards of the bank are capacious tanks, judiciously placed, and kept constantly filled with water. The only deficiencies seem to be the not having two or three resident porters practically acquainted with the management of engines, and the want of pickaxes, saws, and crow-bars, to tear up timbers, floorings, or partitions, which might catch fire.

Of the cause of the late fire, upon a careful resurvey, no doubt could



exist. The aperture cut through the flooring by the workmen, and which was supposed by the clerk of the works to have caused the fire, by the fall of some accidental spark, was found to be wholly untouched by fire, so that no doubt can exist but the iron hearth had, for many days past, been allowed, by the accumulation of burning cinders, to become thoroughly "saturated with heat;" and iron being a powerful retainer and conductor of heat, the strong beam that passed under the hearth, and the ends of the girders which rested thereon, were gradually undergoing a process of decay, from the constant action of heat, till at last they burst into a state of combustion. The property within the bank is wholly uninsured.

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*Testimony of the honorable John Ruggles, Senator in Congress, December 30, 1836.*

I, John Ruggles, having been duly sworn, testify as follows:

I board at Mrs. Carlisle's, at the corner of Pennsylvania avenue and Seventh street, and was awakened by the cry of "fire at the Post Office." I went as soon as possible to that building, and found, perhaps, half a dozen persons standing about it. Observing the eastern door open, I entered it and attempted to enter the letter-room of the city office, one leaf of the inner door being open about eight inches. In opening it and attempting to enter, I found the heat so intense that I could not, and my hair and eye brows were scorched. Standing at the door and stooping so as to look under the smoke, I saw the fire burning about 20 feet from me, it might have been more, in an oblique direction to my left. There was a hole through the floor about the size of a small centre table. I saw it burning round the edges of the hole distinctly, and some fire blazing up through the hole. I noticed no object about the fire. It is my impression that I met a person at the door passing out from the letter room with a bucket; and while in the door I had an impression that water had been thrown toward the fire, but did not reach it, and from the distance, that it would be impossible to reach it without an engine. I made several ineffectual attempts to close the door to smother the fire until an engine could be procured, but could not, by reason of some obstacle which I did not then perceive. I went out and made inquiries where water could be found, and was told there was a pump across the street a little above. I made some attempt to form a line from the pump to the office; there were, however, but few persons present, perhaps ten or a dozen; but I supposed the number would be increasing rapidly. I then directed my attention to the procuring of an engine. Two or three persons were endeavoring to get the engine near by from the engine-house into the street. I assisted in drawing it to the pump. Two or three persons employed themselves in endeavoring to put it into working order, and in unwinding and drawing out the hose. After some time it was announced that it was not in a condition to be used. I then passed to the south front door of the City Post Office, and found some person endeavoring to force it with an axe. This was ten or fifteen minutes after I first arrived at the building, and the dense smoke was issuing through the

letter-hole in that door. I earnestly entreated them not to break the door down until water could be procured, as it would serve to feed the flame and increase the rapidity of its progress. They very reluctantly desisted. Some time after an engine was brought in front of the City Post Office, about which time a window of the City Post Office, I believe the second east of the door, was broken in, a volume of dense smoke first issued, and instantly afterwards a very brilliant flame. After the flame had been issuing a short time, an engine played into the window, and the flames which issued from the window were extinguished instantly; but the water was soon exhausted, the hose having become separated which connected with the hydraulion at the pump which supplied the engine before the building. The flames soon after burst out anew. After some time the hose was again connected, but there appeared to be a scanty supply of water, and the action of the engine was too feeble to throw the water with any effective power into the building.

After the fire, Mr. Cox, a clerk in the City Post Office, described to me the location of the large stove in the letter-room, which corresponded very nearly with the location of the fire, as I saw it.

At any time within 15 or 20 minutes after I arrived at the building, an engine in order, with an efficient company, and a supply of water, would, in my opinion, have extinguished the fire with but little difficulty. I did not notice any smoke issuing from under the platform of the east door when I first arrived at the building; there might have been without my perceiving it. Some ten minutes after I arrived I looked along at the basement windows in front of the building, as far as the City Post Office door, and along the eastern end of Seventh street, and under the platform of the east door, in order to see if there was any fire in the cellar. I saw none, and did not notice smoke at any of them. I looked at the windows at a little distance, and it was so dark that I was unable to see whether the windows were or were not closed by shutters.

JOHN RUGGLES.

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*Statement of James Summers.*

I have been called the "watchman" of the City Post Office, but the labor I had to perform differing materially from that of watchmen, it may be necessary to explain that my duties, through the fore part of the night, were to assist in preparing the mails for delivery; that, upon closing the east door, which was usually done about 10 o'clock, P. M., I was at liberty to retire to rest; but the arrival of several heavy mails after that hour being calculated to disturb my repose, I but seldom retired before midnight. The duties of receiving and delivering all the mails that came in or left the office during the night devolved also upon me. Thus was I employed until about five or six months preceding the fire, when I was required to leave the labors of the office, and to select such a position in my room every night as would enable me to see all persons coming into or leaving the office until the east door was closed, and to receive and deliver the mails through the night, as above stated.

On the night of the conflagration I retired to bed about midnight. The driver who carries the Southern mail to the steamboat, rang me up about three o'clock, A. M. The mail was delivered to him; and after passing

out at the door, looking around, and discovering no human being except the driver, nor aught else to attract attention, I returned, closed and locked the door, and retired to bed, where I soon fell into a profound sleep.

About one hour after, I was aroused by Mr. Crown, a messenger, who slept in the postmaster's room, and who, upon entering my chamber, exclaimed, with a voice indicating much alarm, "Good God! Mr. Summers, where does all this smoke come from?" I immediately sprang out of bed, and perceiving my room filled with a dense smoke, which I knew, both by smell and color, proceeded from the burning of pine-wood; and our coals being kindled with pine, my first research was to ascertain whether the smoke might not proceed from a burning chunk fallen from the grate, and rolled towards the fender. Finding nothing amiss about my fire, I immediately went into the room where the messenger slept, to examine his fire; but upon entering it, found he had none. Disappointed in these researches, and now, for the first time, alarmed for the safety of the building and its valuable contents, I hastened out at the east door, where I immediately discovered the smoke issuing from a window directly under the platform. Stooping under the platform, I perceived the smoke passing obliquely to my right, but could see no fire. While prosecuting this examination, Mr. Crown suddenly spoke of Mr. Cox's danger. Knowing that he was unusually hard to wake, and therefore greatly alarmed for his safety, I ran into my room, and rang the bell with great force. He soon after appeared in his night clothes, and greatly alarmed.

Perceiving the density of the smoke to be rapidly increasing, I again went out and crept further under the platform in order to ascertain the location of the fire, but, although I could then distinctly hear the roaring of the flames, I could not see it. An effort had been made, both by Mr. Crown and myself, to alarm our neighbors by the cry of fire, as soon as it was known to be under the building. And now aware of the increasing danger, and that our force was inadequate to a successful attack on so formidable an enemy, we commenced a more general cry. I then crossed over 7th street, passed the opposite row of buildings, and with loud cries endeavored to alarm their inhabitants; but sleep apparently seemed to hold the dominion; not a window was hoisted, nor voice from within heard. I again returned to the Post Office, and passed along the south side to the west end, where I was asked by some person from within, "what was the matter?" I answered, the Post Office is on fire. I then ran down 7th street to Pennsylvania avenue; and in passing up the avenue, I met with three black boys, who, at my request, assisted in giving the alarm. I continued up the avenue to 10th street, passed up 10th to E, and then along E to the office. In performing this round I awoke many persons. On my arrival at the office, I found a number of persons engaged in moving the furniture and books of the General Post Office; and perceiving, through the window blinds, that the flame had made its way into the City Post Office, and all hope of extinguishing the fire at an end, I joined and continued in the labors of removal until the close of the scene.

JAMES SUMMERS.

The deponent further says that there was no plaster or ceiling over head in the cellars of the Post Office building, the floor joists or timbers

on which the floors laid, were totally uncovered. At the time he first passed out at the east door of the Post Office, and saw the smoke issuing from under the great step stone, or platform, he passed round the corner to the south side of the building, but did not see or discover any smoke or fire coming out of the south windows of the building; the window under the platform was open, and the windows on the south side were closed. The wood in the cellar of the City Post Office was packed from the ground up to the floor.

JAMES SUMMERS.

January 27, 1837.

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*Statement of Samuel Crown.*

Samuel Crown, of Washington, D. C., testifies and says that he is the messenger to the City Post Office, and remained in the office all the night of the conflagration of the General Post Office, which took place on the morning of the 15th of December last; that he makes the fires for said office. On the morning of the 14th of December, this deponent took up the ashes in the fire-place in said office, where there had been a fire on the day previous, and carried the ashes and deposited them in the passage in the cellar under said office, about equi-distant from two door-ways opening from said passage into the wood-rooms of said post office, which were then occupied with wood and coal for the use of the office; there were openings also on the north side of said passage, one occupied as a wood-room, and the other leading up stairs into the room occupied as the post office. The ashes were placed on the ground of the cellar, and against the brick partition wall. The ground of the cellar was damp at the time; the ashes were cold when taken up, and no fire seen in them; there was about one barrel of ashes on the ground at the time he deposited the ashes, as above stated.

This deponent says that he was in the office until thirty-five minutes after two o'clock on the morning of the 15th, when he retired to his bed in the southeast corner room, commonly occupied by Doctor Jones. This deponent was awake at three o'clock, and heard the Southern mail when it left the office. Sometime afterwards, about or nearly four o'clock, this deponent was awoken by the smoke in the room; he immediately arose, and after examining his own room, went into the passage leading out of the east door, and discovered the outside door open; there was as much smoke in the entry as in his room; he then went out of the east door, and went round on the south front of the building, and examined the cellar windows, and perceived smoke coming out of all the windows, and at the window nearest the south door of the Post Office discovered considerable heat issuing from the window; he then cried fire! fire! went back and alarmed Mr. Cox, first by ringing the bell leading to his room, then by going outside, round to his window, and knocking against it, and then rang the bell again. Mr. Cox then came out of his room, and then the deponent went to the window from whence the heat issued, to show Mr. Cox; but whether Mr. Cox went to the window or not this deponent cannot say. Mr. Cox advised him to go after Mr. Kennedy, the chief clerk in the City Post Office; he, the deponent, went after Mr. Kennedy, awoke him, and then returned to the post office, and went into



the room where he slept, and got his pantaloons ; the room was then so full of smoke he could not breathe in it. Mr. Kennedy soon came, and we went to the south window, where the smoke and heat continued to issue, but did not see any fire ; then the deponent went to assist in getting out the engine. After we got the engine in readiness, it proved to be out of order and useless ; the deponent then went into the post office and discovered fire about the centre of the room, not far from the stove ; the fire immediately spread with great rapidity until the whole building was on fire. That, previous to his calling Mr. Cox, he attempted to go down cellar with a candle, but could not for the density of the smoke.

SAMUEL CROWN.

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*Statement of Henry Bishop, sen.*

I am messenger of the Patent Office, which office I have held six years last November.

On the night of the fire I was alarmed by a knocking at my next door neighbor's house, and heard a person say that the Post Office was on fire ; I immediately rose out of bed, dressed myself, looked at my watch, which was about half past four ; it is generally too fast. I called my eldest son, Henry, a young man, and sent him to Mr. Ellsworth's house to inform him of the fire.

I immediately went to the building, ascended the steps of the City Post Office on E street, looked in at the window east of the steps, and saw that the large room was full of black smoke with a red blaze in about the middle of the room, in a northeasterly direction from where I stood. I did not stay more than a minute in this place ; my first object was to get into the Patent Office, having the keys with me. I attempted to get into the building at the door on 7th street, but from some cause which I do not well recollect, I could not enter ; whether the door was fast or the smoke prevented I cannot positively say. I then went to the front of the building on E street, passed through the door of the General Post Office into the yard north of the building. I then went to a back door communicating with the City Post Office and Patent Office, found it open, with a great deal of smoke in the passage, apparently coming from the large room occupied by the City Post Office. I attempted several times to ascend the stairs of the Patent Office, but the smoke was so thick and suffocating that I was obliged to desist.

I then went into the yard north of the building and saw a person looking into the cellars to see if there was any fire to be seen, but there was none. I then went to the front of the building on E street to examine the Patent Office cellar, which was under the City Post Office ; I pushed open the shutter just west of the City Post Office steps and went into the cellar, where I could see nothing, for it was total darkness.

I then left the cellar. By this time Mr. Ellsworth had arrived and I joined him ; we made some more attempts to get into the Patent Office, which were unsuccessful ; the smoke and flames filled the building and we were obliged to retreat.

After all hope of saving the building had been given up, and I was watching the progress of the fire, I was informed that Dr. Jones, City Postmaster, was speaking about ashes being kept in the Patent Office cellar, under the City Post Office, and conveyed the idea that the fire might have originated there. I immediately went to Mr. Ellsworth and told him of the remarks of Dr. Jones. While I was speaking to Mr. Ellsworth Dr. Jones came where we were; I then told Mr. Ellsworth and Dr. Jones that there could not be any fire in the Patent Office cellar for I had been in the cellar since the fire and it was entirely dark. I likewise offered, in the presence of Mr. Ellsworth and Dr. Jones, to open the shutter and go in again, but they said it was not worth while.

On the subject of the ashes I have to state that, as soon as the clerks left the office for the day, the fire was not covered with ashes to keep fire for the next day, but the brands were put together, a screen put before the fire, and the fire left to burn out, so that there was very seldom any fire the next morning. In the morning the ashes were taken up in an iron hod and never emptied till the next day, and sometimes longer; the day previous to the fire, Wednesday, ashes had been emptied from the Patent Office that had been taken from the hearths on the Monday previous, and perhaps some might have been taken up on Tuesday; but I am sure there was none taken up on Wednesday. The ashes were put in a large wooden box in the cellar under the large room occupied by the City Post Office; the box stood by itself on a ground floor about eight or nine feet from the floor above.

HENRY BISHOP.

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*Statement of Cornelius Cox.*

Cornelius Cox, a clerk in the City Post Office, testifies and says that, on the morning of the 15th of December last I was awoke by some noise, and upon getting up immediately concluded the office was on fire, as the room was filled with smoke. I opened the door which led into the post office, and ran through out of the east door to a room occupied by Mr. Summers. In doing this I suppose I passed through 15 or 20 feet of the office, and saw no light; but the smoke was so dense that it was with great difficulty that I could breathe, and heard a crackling under the floor very distinctly. In Mr. Summers's room I met him and Mr. Crown. I said, Crown, where in the world does all this smoke come from? He said he did not know, but believed the cellar was on fire. I then asked him if he had been down in the cellar. He said no, but had attempted to do so, and proceeded a few steps, when he found the smoke so thick that it put out his candle, and was forced back for fear of suffocation. I told him to go over and wake up Mr. Kennedy, one of the clerks of the office, who lives within a half a square. I then ran out of the office on the pavement to the front, and saw the smoke coming out of the window under the steps at the east of the office, and had a full view of the whole front, but saw no person up to this time, with the exception of Summers and Crown. I then went back again through the office to my room, for the purpose of dressing myself, and in passing over the floor heard the crackling and rumbling of the fire below so clearly that I was apprehensive the floor would give way, and also a knocking at the door

communicating with the Post Office Department. I put on my pantaloons, took my coat in my hand, and jumped out of the window at the back of the office, and ran round again to the front, not returning in the same way that I went in, on account of the great danger, as I thought at the time of the floor falling in. I there met Mr. Crown, and asked him if he had been over for Mr. Kennedy. He told me he had. (I was very anxious to get this gentleman over as early as possible, as I knew he had the key of the desk which contained the money belonging to the office.) Crown then went around and burst the cellar windows open until he came to the third one from the east corner, when he said, Here Mr. Cox, here it is (meaning the fire) just under here. I looked, but could see nothing but the smoke rushing out. At this time I recognised Mr. John Suter, of the Post Office Department, and four or five others. Mr. Kennedy then came over and tried to enter the office at the east door, but was repulsed by the smoke. I told him that the window of my room was open, and probably he might get in there. We then went around, and the smoke was issuing from it very thick. He told me I had better get in and save some of my clothing. I did so, and threw out a part of them, having every moment to thrust my head out of the window for air. After I got out of the window, and was gathering up the clothes that I had thrown out, I saw Mr. Bishop, the messenger of the Patent Office, who told me that he had been trying to get up to that office, but could not do so for the smoke. After this I went in the Post Office Department and assisted in saving the books and papers belonging to that Department. Neither time that I passed through or looked into the City Post Office was there any fire to be seen, nor did it get through for 20 or 30 minutes after I was up. If the fire had originated in the City Post Office it would have been seen immediately, as there was a great quantity of combustible material there. I would here state that we got through the work and closed the office that morning about half past two o'clock, and I was up about ten minutes after the other clerks had gone, during which time I attended particularly to extinguishing the lights and securing the fires; looked into the stove and saw that the fire had nearly gone out, there being nothing but a few coals, and they nearly covered with ashes; placed a brick before the door and went over to the fire-place. In this fire-place we burnt coal, and were in the habit of keeping fire there throughout the night; it had gone down lower than usual, and fresh coal had been thrown on so as to completely cover up all the fire there was remaining, and I was fearful that it would go out entirely; saw that a large iron screen which we had was placed before it, for the purpose of keeping any coals that might fall off the grate from rolling on the floor.

The carpenter's work throughout the office had shrunk generally, and the floor particularly was very open, so much so that I have often noticed places about the wash-boards, where it had been neglected to have been swept for a short time, covered with coal-dust and other dirt blown up through the crevices from the cellar, which will account for the office being so full of smoke.

It was impossible to open the door at the south front of the office. I was the only person that penetrated any distance in. When I first came out, I did so without knowing what was the matter; and when I went back, it was under the impression that I was risking my life; but had

nothing on but my shirt, and forced myself through. It is my decided opinion that if any person had attempted to open that door from the inside they would have suffocated, as they not only would have been obliged to have gone a very considerable distance through the office, which was obstructed by tables and baskets used for the distribution of newspapers, and to have opened a door leading into the lobby, which was locked, before they could have got to the main door, which was locked, bolted, and barred, besides having a large letter-box placed before it, which would have had to be removed. But there was no necessity for opening that door, as any person disposed to enter the office could have tried through the east door, as that entrance was open the whole time.

The great Eastern mail arrived about 15 minutes after 11 o'clock on the night of the fire. The letters and papers were taken out of the mail-bags, and those for the members of Congress placed in boxes ready to be delivered to the messengers of the two Houses; and the letters for the citizens were distributed in the several appropriate boxes. The boxes containing the letters and papers for members of Congress were in the southeast corner of the room of the post office. It is my opinion that those letters and papers could not have been saved, on account of the dense smoke. The Port Tobacco, Warrenton, and Georgetown mails were in the room occupied by Doctor Jones. These mails might have been saved if we had thought of them immediately after getting up; but we were occupied in giving the alarm and ascertaining where the fire was, so that they entirely escaped our attention. The large mails had all left the office. The Southern mail was the last, which was about 3 o'clock in the morning.

CORNELIUS COX.